

EXPERIENCE AT PEARL HARBOR

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- > The material below was prepared in April, 2002 as a record for those who
- > come after me, in the hope that they will find something interesting in the
- > experience of one of their ancestors.
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- > When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Sunday morning, December
- > 7, 1941, I was attached to the Oklahoma, a battleship moored at Ford Island
- > alongside the Maryland, another battleship. I had the rank of Ensign, having
- > been graduated from the Naval Academy eighteen months earlier. I was
- > assigned as Junior Turret Officer in Turret 3, a three-fourteen-inch turret,
- > and on that morning I was on duty.
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- > I finished my breakfast at seven-forty-five and went topside to
- > relieve the watch. At a few minutes before eight I observed aircraft flying
- > around in all directions. At first I paid little attention, since our own
- > aviators were in the habit of practicing every morning, including Sundays.
- > However, suddenly I heard explosions and saw black smoke rising everywhere
- > and I realized that this was a real attack.
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- > I looked up and saw an airplane almost directly overhead, barely
- > clearing the masthead. After all these years I can still see that plane,
- > with black grease on the cowling and two men looking over the side.
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- > The alarm was sounded and I ran forward in an attempt to reach my
- > battle station. As I ran, there was a series of heavy explosions and the
- > ship shuddered and began to list. I realized later that the first of
- > these explosions must have been from the first torpedo, dropped from the
- > plane I had just seen.
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> Eventually I found myself in a crew's living compartment with about
> thirty sailors. By this time there was nothing any of us could do but try
> to escape. As an officer, I had to be the last man out of the
> compartment. By this time the ship had listed nearly forty-five degrees, and I went
> up the ladder on my hands and knees. I emerged in the sunshine and stayed
> on top of the hull as the ship turned over and rested nearly upside down in
> the mud on the bottom.

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The surface of the water everywhere was covered with fuel oil, much
> of it burning. Men were swimming in it, many of them screaming with
> pain. Boats were plying in all directions trying to rescue them. And the
> Japanese were still up there, dropping their bombs.

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> I peeled to the waist and, leaving my uniform, watch and Academy
> ring, let myself down into the water on a parted mooring line, and with the
> help of a sailor towed another sailor across the gap to the Maryland, which
> had been protected from torpedoes by the Oklahoma. There we were all hoisted
> aboard and went below to the sick bay to wash off the oil. The clock read
> eight-fifteen—all these events had taken just seventeen minutes.

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> I stayed aboard the Maryland until the attack finally ended, at about ten o'clock. We took just
one hit—a hundred-pound bomb which exploded harmlessly on the heavy top-armor of a gun
turret.

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> I spent the rest of the day and that night on Ford Island, during which our own planes from
the Enterprise tried to land, some of them being shot down by mistake by our own antiaircraft
guns. The following day I went over to the Submarine Base, where to my surprise my wallet,
watch and ring were returned to me intact.

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> In the course of the war I served in two other ships, always in antiaircraft gunnery, and I
helped shoot down many Japanese aircraft, but I never saw another Japanese as close as those
two who flew overhead that morning. That, I am sure, is why I have never felt the same hatred
of the Japanese as those who experienced the Bataan death march or the horrors of the
> prison camps. In their position I would have felt the same way.

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